



# Community at the Heart of COVID-19 Prevention Efforts, Delivery of Essential Health Services.

It's noon in late November at a suburb in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region. In one of the neighborhoods of Mkolani ward, Mr Haruna Mtunda is preparing to attend a meeting in his ward where he coordinates communal activities. But, Mtunda, aged 71 and an influential man, has a confession to make: *"I had refused to be vaccinated."*

Mtunda says he didn't have trust in the COVID-19 vaccines and believed the disease doesn't exist.

*"We heard people saying that the COVID-19 vaccines were unsafe, and there was document making rounds which, as we were told, meant that people were being vaccinated at their own risk. Honestly, I refused..."*, says Mtunda.

But, he admits, *"I came to learn that I didn't have the right information."*

His stance and that of other members of the community like him, changed albeit after months of being misinformed.

That was after Community Health Workers (CHW) recruited by Benjamin Mkapa Foundation (BMF) through the Pambana na Korona Project under UNFPA support, visited neighborhoods in Mkolani and provided accurate information about COVID-19; its cause, how it's transmitted, prevented and the importance of getting vaccinated.

*"A community health worker came to this area repeatedly, and each time I listened to him, I began to understand COVID-19 as a disease and its impact. I then decided that I will get vaccinated. I did it,"* says Mtunda.



Mr Haruna Mtunda(right) a resident of Mkolani ward in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region displays his vaccination card weeks after he received his shot of Janssen vaccine. PHOTO; BMF

His negative sentiments about the vaccines, however, were undeniably impactful to many in his community, a scenario that represents the wider impact of misinformation and lack of awareness about the pandemic in Tanzania and the rest of the world.

Yonana Lucas, who works and lives in Nyamagana, is one of the 1072 CHWs recruited by BMF in four regions of the country under the support of UNFPA, who were equipped to raise awareness about the pandemic.

During the month of October, 2021 a total of 138,752 household visits were conducted by CHWs in four regions of Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Mwanza and Pwani regions, with a target of reaching 51,456 households per month.

Region	CHW Target	CHW at Work
Mwanza	346	346
Pwani	226	226
Arusha	221	221
Kilimanjaro	279	279
<b>Total CHW's</b>	<b>1,072</b>	<b>1,072</b>

Guided by the Community Based Health Program (CBHP) service packages, the CHWs created awareness on COVID 19 and prevention, uptake of COVID 19 vaccines in their respective villages.

Lucas says, *“First of all, the training I got from Benjamin Mkapa Foundation, gave me the confidence to face the communities where people had a lot of questions about coronavirus and vaccines. I had the right knowledge and working tools such as a smartphone, uniform, identity card, gumboots, an umbrella, facemasks and rain coats.”*

*“I feel impressed each time I visit communities and find people wearing face masks and washing hands in the correct way. Recently, I have heard many people telling me that their friends and relatives need COVID-19 vaccines. To me, that’s a great improvement,”* explains Lucas.

At Daraja Mbili ward in Arusha, Ms Mwajuma Omari was equipped with skills to follow up patients who are on Ante-Retroviral Treatment (ART).

*“During my household visits in communities, I usually come across people living with HIV who have given up on taking their medication. My roll*

Frank Joel, just like Lucas has been engaging communities about COVID-19 prevention, alongside other interventions as per the District micro plans for implementation of the National Deployment Plan for COVID 19 vaccination, and other essential health services.

Joel also advocated family planning, Reproductive and Child Health and enrollment of communities in Improved Community Health Fund (ICHF).

*“During this pandemic, we have not left behind other*



Yobana Lucas(right) a Community Health Worker (CHW) at Mkolani Ward, Nyamagana District in Mwanza Region shares best practices on face mask wearing among community members who had visited Mkolani Health Centre. PHOTO: BMF

*services. We have made sure that we educate people in our communities to continue visiting health facilities for RCH services and family planning,” says Joel. “During this time, I have also enrolled many people in CHF, after I was assigned the duty of enrollment officer in this area.”*

Throughout Nyamagana and Ilemela Districts of Mwanza, where BMF rolled out the Pambana na Korona Project, communities have been prioritized in the efforts to curtail transmission of coronavirus, and CHWs have been catalyst in extending services, linking up households with health facilities through a referral system.

According to the project’s targets, each CHW aimed at reaching 48 households per month. Through the household visits, a population of 586,126 was reached with key COVID-19 messages including those on COVID 19 prevention, uptake of vaccine, other outbreaks diseases and essential health service.

*“CHWs were able to penetrate in market places, certain gatherings and break through the cultural barriers to reach people living in areas that we could otherwise not reach in terms of health services and sensitization. Without them, the job would have been tougher,” says Enisa Mbilinyi, District Community-based Health Promotion Coordinator (DCBHPCo) in Ilemela Municipality, Mwanza Region.*

*“Because of the communication facilities that CHWs were equipped with through Mkapa Foundation, it’s now easier and quicker to access reports about the progress of community interventions. They are also motivated because they receive financial incentives to facilitate their movement,” says Ms Mbilinyi.*

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